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In Loco Communitas: Service-Learning and the Liberal Arts

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In Loco Communitas: Service-Learning and the Liberal Arts

Abstract:
This essay places service-learning within the liberal arts tradition of empowering others to help themselves. Such a contextualization departs from visions of the student as consumer or customer and education as a means to gain economic advantage in a competitive market. Attention then turns to how even well-intentioned service-learning projects might be co-opted in ways that foster community dependence on the services offered. Recommendations are included for a version of service-learning that navigates between political indoctrination and value-free objectivity.

Service-learning figures prominently in the national agenda for higher education reform. Increasingly, educators and institutions are embracing community-based experiential learning to counter apparent widespread student disengagement from traditional classroom instruction. Doing so might also redress student apathy toward constructive social involvement. Hepburn (1997) provides a concise working definition of service-learning as "active involvement in the local community as a constructive and natural extension of classroom citizen education" (p. 136). Communication teachers and scholars evidently have a particularly large stake in this project (Morreale and Droge, 1999). Communication skills, for example, will prove vital when students interact with members of the communities they serve (DeVitis, Johns, and Simpson, 1998, p. 9). Articulate students also can become more effective agents of social change through service-learning (Battistoni, 1997, pp. 152-153). By teaching communication skills explicitly within the context of community activism, the communication discipline might reassert more strongly its traditional claim of preparing students for responsible citizenship, a claim it shares with service-learning advocates (cf. Battistoni, 1997; Brandell and Hinck, 1997; Clark et al., 1997; Hepburn, 1997; Kinsley, 1997). Combining community service with academic study might forge the connection between communication and action strongly enough to withstand persistent characterizations of communication studies as intellectually vacuous, and improve the discipline's reputation in an era of market-driven higher education. Beyond this, the communication discipline also can add much to

current knowledge about service-learning. By concentrating on how service-learning could alter patterns of discourse about higher education and community involvement, communication scholars could trace the implications this discourse might have for educational and social practice.

This essay considers several issues raised by the service-learning movement in higher education. First, we situate the objectives of service-learning within discussions concerning the goals of liberal education. This philosophical groundwork leads to considering how service-learning might depart from visions of the student as consumer or customer and education as a means to gain economic advantage in a competitive market. We next investigate how well-intentioned service-learning projects might be co-opted in ways that foster community dependence on service-learning as a source of inexpensive or uncompensated student labor. Such dependence could undermine the potential for structural solutions to social problems that might result in more productive and far-reaching change. We then make several recommendations for a version of service-learning that navigates between political indoctrination and value-free objectivity.

On a broader scale, our effort responds to the question posed by Jacoby (1996a): "How can service-learning research contribute to the development of more comprehensive theories of epistemology and learning?" (p. 325) This question assumes special importance given the pressing need to find out whether or not service-learning can help to nurture in college students "the long-term development of a social ethic of caring, commitment, and civic engagement" (Giles and Eyler, 1998, p. 69) as a counterpoint to their well-documented preoccupation with self-interest.

Is Service-Learning Compatible with Liberal Education?

In the September 1999 issue of *University Business*, an advertising insert for a conference on higher education marketing poses a question and an answer with almost Orwellian overtones: "Is higher education for sale? You bet it is." This underscores Willimon and Naylor's claim that "[a] capitalist culture has a way of commodifying everything, even knowledge" (1995, p. 46). Classroom educators

find themselves in a double-bind. On one hand, higher education administrators and vendors–often with our complicity–are jointly engaged in technocratic agenda-setting that is fundamentally at odds with the aims of liberal education. For example, one of the author's colleagues in Computer Information Systems now speaks unselfconsciously, indeed even casually, of "teaching" software products to his students, thereby transforming the professor into a highly-compensated (and subsidized) on-site technical consultant for a leading software manufacturer and, one would think, into something less than the computer scientist this professor envisioned himself becoming earlier in his career. On the other hand, students pressure educators to teach them "how to be moneymaking machines" (Willimon and Naylor, p. 39). Higher education seems to be entangling itself in a predicament Oakeshott described—or prophesied—almost thirty years ago:

> A university needs to beware of the patronage of this world [of power and utility], or it will find that it has sold its birthright for a mess of pottage; it will find that instead of studying and teaching the languages and literatures of the world it has become a school for training interpreters, that instead of pursuing science it is engaged in training electrical engineers or industrial chemists, that instead of studying history it is studying and teaching history for some ulterior purpose, that instead of educating men and women it is training them exactly to fill some niche in society (in Fuller, 1989, p. 103).

The liberating ideal of liberal education expanding the horizons of students, letting them define their own possibilities, suffers under a narrow vocational pedagogy. Only tradition, however, privileges classrooms as a sites of liberal learning. Service-learning, as a way of expanding learning environments, and liberal education are not necessarily incompatible. Thus, we pose the question: How well do the philosophy and practice of service-learning conform to the ideals of liberal education?

Giamatti (1988) summarizes an ideal of liberal education that finds fuller expression in Newman's *The Idea of the University*: "A liberal education rests on the supposition that our humanity is

enriched by the pursuit of learning for its own sake; it is dedicated to the proposition that growth in thought, and in the power to think, increases the pleasure, breadth, and value of life" (p. 121). Were they to conform to this ideal, the justification for service-learning programs would rest solely on their capacity to enrich the "power to think" and, correspondingly, to enable students "to express the results of [their] thinking in speech and in writing with logic, clarity, and grace" (pp. 122, 129-30, 136). Battistoni (1997) affirms that liberal education and service-learning should have commensurate goals: "Service learning programs should aim at developing in students their critical thinking [and communication] skills" (p. 152). Specific vocational aims would be secondary and incidental to these goals, and would never constitute the *raison d'être* for service-learning projects. As Giamatti puts it: "If you pursue the study of anything not for the intrinsic rewards of exercising and developing the power of the mind but because you press toward a professional goal, then you are pursuing not a liberal education but rather something else" (p. 121), i.e., training to perform specific tasks rather than learning to innovate and adapt to change.

Ehrlich (1999) recognizes that service-learning encourages types of intellectual discovery not normally encouraged in traditional classroom settings. Service-learning enhances civic knowledge, which deals with how social institutions actually work, and moral learning, which involves "reinforcing the elements of character that lead to ethical actions" (p. 6). Reluctant to over-claim the benefits of service-learning, Ehrlich observes instead that moral action becomes more likely when learners become conscious of their obligations toward others and their need to act cooperatively.

Giamatti (1998) also points out that "liberal education desires to foster a freedom of the mind that will also contribute, in its measure, to the freedom of others" (p. 124). Here we find what appears to be a more intuitive fit between service-learning and liberal education: *contributing to the freedom of others*. Emphasizing the importance of service as an academic ideal, Boyer (1990) claims that "higher education and the rest of society have never been more interdependent than they are today . . . and . . .

campuses [should] be more energetically engaged in the pressing issues of our time" (pp. 76-77). Service-learning programs are especially well-suited for bringing college students and faculty into direct contact with societal concerns that classroom instruction tends to address in abstract terms. However, an important caution here stems from Oakeshott's observation. The agenda for service-learning should not be to train students for public service "careers." The capacities to think and to communicate cogently and compassionately, and to transcend the limits of self-interest, should not be pre-professionalized at the undergraduate level so that they become mere components of hyphenated career tracks. Not only does this mitigate the "learning for learning's sake" ideal, but it also undermines the goal of "contributing to the freedom of others." One might understand this point as the differentiation between educating for careers and education of carers.

McKnight (1995) warns that the professionalization of care-giving carries with it the risk that whole communities may become dependent on professionalized services and, in the process, lose their capacity for *self-caring*: "[O]ur problem is not ineffective service-producing institutions. In fact, our institutions are too powerful, authoritative, and strong. Our problem is weak communities, made ever more impotent by our strong service systems" (p. ix). Moreover, McKnight (1995) contends:

> Service systems can never be reformed so they will 'produce' care. Care is the consenting commitment of citizens to one another. Care cannot be produced, managed, organized, administered, or commodified. Care is the only thing a system cannot produce. Every institutional effort to replace the real thing is a counterfeit. (x)

All of the most important objectives traditionally associated with liberal education presume and, in fact, are quite meaningless apart from, full engagement in the life of a community. Service-learning, when properly conceived and implemented as a means of re-engaging students with both the life of the community and the life of the mind, can do much to restore public confidence in, and the prestige of, liberal education.

Can Service Learning Transcend Educational Consumerism?

Throughout the last decade, the student population in higher education has become older, more diverse, and more likely to have full-time responsibilities such as jobs and families that are more important to them than college. Consequently, "higher education is not as central to the lives of today's undergraduates as it was to previous generations. Increasingly, college is just one of several activities in which they are engaged every day. For many, it is not even the most important of these activities; work and family often overshadow it" (Levine and Cureton, 1998, p. 14). While today's undergraduates may appreciate the potential economic value of a college degree, they are much less interested in those aspects of collegiate life that seem to have little or no relevance to their narrowly conceived career aspirations. Even among students who accept the broader aims of liberal education, careerism is the main concern (Moffatt, 1989, pp. 274-75). This would include extracurricular activities, involvement in student government and the obscure ideals of liberal education that many faculty members tend to profess. In other words, for this generation of undergraduates, "pursuit of academic goals is clearly utilitarian" (Levine and Cureton, p. 16). Correspondingly, they don't want to pay–either in time or money–for anything that they perceive to be ancillary to their economic self-interest: "In short, students increasingly are bringing to higher education exactly the same consumer expectations they have for every other commercial establishment with which they deal. Their focus is on convenience, quality, service, and cost" (Levine and Cureton, p. 14).

The attenuation of social responsibilities in the face of expanding consumer rights reinforces the disjunction of rights and duties symptomatic of a growing "apathy and narcissism" at the expense of public service (Etzioni in Evers, pp. 145-146). Proponents of total quality management, for example, come very close to rendering quality synonymous with economy. Sutcliffe and Pollock (1992), who explicitly equate the customer with the student, define quality as providing whatever

- Satisfies the customer

- Is as cheap as possible
- Can be achieved in time to meet delivery requirements. (p. 12)

Presumably the third component, derived from industrial production models, means that educational institutions can respond to urgent personnel needs of prospective employers. Clearly, most educational institutions find that decisions must be made primarily in light of cost limitations, especially since customer satisfaction and rapid response almost always involve more resources.

The consumer metaphor seems antithetical to the inculcation of social responsibility, a task central to the service-learning initiative. When service-learning enters the picture, pursuit of personal gain fits into the larger context of how such gain might contribute to causes that benefit others. The tendency to describe education in commercial terms should invigorate the search for more appropriate ways to conceptualize the role of education in a democracy.

Jacoby (1996a, pp. 319-320) sees the widespread adoption of practices borrowed from business, such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and strategic planning, as opportunities to advocate greater rewards for service. Other commentators are less sanguine about these trends. Weigert (1998) decries the displacement of broader, civic notions of education by a consumerist mentality. She complains that "the all-pervasive metaphor of the individual as a *consumer* crowds out such metaphors as *citizen* or *neighbor*, which capture and celebrate our interrelationships" (Weigert, 1998, p. 3; emphasis in original). Indeed, the "lip service" academic institutions give to "the ideal of knowledge for its own sake and the common good" contrasts sharply with the stark reality that academics often adopt the corporate ideology of individual prosperity without concomitant community responsibility (Mendel-Reyes, 1998, p. 34). Apparently this tendency holds true empirically as well as philosophically. Although faculty continue to tout the virtues of community service for students, data from the latest national faculty survey conducted by UCLA over the past decade show that fewer faculty actually engage in such service themselves (UCLA, 1999). While community service initiatives of many kinds have blossomed on college

campuses, faculty as a whole have not become as involved as they could and should be.

An allied risk of the consumerist viewpoint is to treat whoever assumes the consumer role as an individual whose desires should be satisfied, but the legitimacy and quality of these desires escapes attention. Additionally, consumers take little active role in creating products and services, whereas everyone in the educational process shares a stake and becomes a participant in the educational process (McMillan and Cheney, 1996). Service-learning offers a much more interactive picture of education, with faculty, students, and community members collaborating to achieve common or interrelated goals. Unlike the consumer model, which gives the illusion that student-customers control the educational process (Cheney, McMillan, and Schwartzman, 1997), service-learning legitimately empowers students by making them agents of social change.

Although service-learning has been embraced by educational institutions, civic organizations, and corporations, it straddles the historic tensions between educating students for democratic action and equipping students with skills transferable to the workplace (Lisman, 1998, p. 27). Ideally, the citizen educated for democracy constantly strives for civic improvements, urging and agitating for changes that could move toward social justice for populations that remain marginalized by oppressive governmental and commercial practices. By contrast, the prospective employee educated for the workforce acquires skills that would enhance advocacy for the interests of the employer. The difference between these orientations sometimes reduces to prioritizing equity or efficiency, and both are needed if democracy, at least a capitalist version, is to survive.

Lisman (1998) contends that the preoccupation with "consumerist politics" is incompatible with genuine service-learning. The consumerist view holds that the distribution of resources results from market mechanisms that, while not always fair, do self-correct if left to themselves. This laissez-faire attitude toward social problems encourages the minimum governmental intervention in economic and social life. In this atmosphere, service-learning efforts can replace the perceived need to address these

issues through concerted governmental or corporate activism. Although the extant political and economic system might cause inequities, it also includes a ready supply of service-learners to redress them. The problems of democracy do not seem systematic as long as socially conscious students can be mustered to patch minor lapses rather than correct endemic weaknesses in socioeconomic norms and practices (Lisman, 1998).

The roots and fruits of consumerism extend further. The idea that education should prepare students for the workforce certainly has merit, but the capacity for workplace productivity should extend to productive efforts in public life (Lisman, 1998, p. 65). In fact, if future employees lack awareness of their social obligations, they could act irresponsibly in a corporate environment, failing to recognize their organization's responsibilities to the communities it serves. Service-learning helps remedy the narrow vocational focus on learning as the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills obtainable only through specific programs of study. Service-learning is inherently interdisciplinary insofar as it encourages students and faculty to pool resources to address community needs, transcending departmental boundaries (Eyler and Giles, 1999). Efforts to develop effective service-learning programs should reduce the tendency of departments to become compartments, insulating students and faculty in one field from the benefits of studying outside their area of focus.

Although service-learning has the potential to reduce consumerist tendencies, the evaluative standards employed by the Corporation for National Service (CNS) are replete with metaphors borrowed from the TQM movement in corporate America. The first three CNS criteria for programs engaged in service are:

> 1. Our "customers" are the reason we exist. We must stay attuned to their needs and strive always to exceed their expectations.
> 2. Volunteers, participants and staff are customers too. They must be motivated, trained and satisfied if they are to serve our customers well.

> 3. It is not enough to talk about customer satisfaction. We must set measurable goals, communicate them throughout our organization, regularly and systematically gauge our progress against these goals, and take action to continuously improve our performance. (quoted in Mintz and Hesser, 1996, pp. 32-33)

Consumerism obscures the extent of reciprocity between server and served (Mintz and Hesser, 1996, pp. 35-37). Barber (1990) balks at modeling civic activity after the marketplace. Like many others, he sees service as a way to offer models of social engagement that can depart from the competitive, adversarial relations that dominate commercial transactions. While education may help prepare students for the workplace, the value of learning extends beyond its market value. Rhoads (1997) distinguishes two senses of Dewey's call for experiential education. Vocational preparation, while important, does not exhaust the mission of education. Additionally, Dewey's vision of education implies that students should "better understand themselves and how they fit within a democratic society" (Rhoads, 1997, p. 210).

Service-learning, insofar as it escapes from self-centered commercialism, could resolve the paradoxical pulls of academic freedom (with its price of ivory tower irrelevance to the surrounding community) and responsibility to an institution's many stakeholders: students, parents, faculty, etc. By placing members of the academic community amidst non-academic people and projects, service-learning enlarges the scope of academic conversation to include more stakeholders beyond the academy's walls as participants (Goodman and MacNeil, 1999). Indirect evidence suggests that service-learning and materialistic acquisitiveness are incompatible. Astin's (1999/1996, p. 594) research shows that commitment to service tends to be lowest at institutions that place "resource acquisition" as a top priority.

Does Service-Learning Overcome Social Quietism?

To yield both academic and social advantages, service-learning must abandon justifications

framed in "the language of rhetorical heroism" (Gramsci, 1985, p. 204). The language of rhetorical heroism, which is the code of choice in much service-learning literature, accepts social conditions insofar as they constitute an arena for playing out reformist rather than radical agendas. Service-learning has the as-yet unrealized capacity to contribute to intellectual and social liberation or, typically, to pursue social reforms incrementally without inviting sustained ideological critique. We believe that the synergies of service and learning should enable students "to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted,' and thereby to generate fresh alternatives for social action" (Gergen, p. 109). In sum, if service-learning is to fit the paradigm of liberal education, it must, as we have emphasized already, "foster a freedom of the mind that will also contribute, in its measure, to the freedom of others" (Giamatti, p. 124).

Another way of making this point will be more familiar to communication scholars. Employing communication theories in community settings epitomizes what McGee (1982) envisions for materialist rhetoric: recognizing how rhetorical theory plays out in action. Service-learning extends materialism further. McGee (1982) sought to show how concrete discourse should not play second fiddle to abstract theory. According to this view, rhetoric is "a natural social phenomenon" that signifies, solidifies, and alters social relationships (McGee, 1982, p. 38). What better way exists to observe, describe, practice, and critique these discursively engineered relationships than participating in them at the grassroots level? Service-learning offers a laboratory for the practice of materialist rhetoric in two senses. First, it provides a forum for participating in rather than theorizing about ways to instigate social change. Second, service-learning supplies a testing-ground for communication theory. As a "real world" laboratory to test theoretical claims, service-learning accomplishes what Bowers (1968) implored communication scholars to do: use communication theory to generate hypotheses, then test them empirically. Theory and practice should have a cyclical relationship in service-learning. Students learn

communication principles and theories in their readings and class discussions. Then they apply and test these ideas in actual communication settings beyond the walls of the college classroom. Subsequent course-work builds on what the students learned from their experiences in the community. This experience confirms, disconfirms, or modifies what has been learned about communication. New or modified ideas about communicative practice then can be tested in other community-based experience. This continuous cycle of promulgating ideas, testing them in the community, then modifying the ideas and re-testing them epitomizes science at its best, but with one difference. The laboratories are not ideal, controlled environments, but the natural settings of everyday communicative practice.

Service-learning offers a site for the interaction of theory with practice, but it also tests the extent of social activism. Students visiting, for example, elderly nursing home residents can accomplish quite a lot of good. For the elderly, it provides needed social interaction and connections with other life-contexts. For students, it gives opportunities for inter-generational communication experiences and practice in empathetic listening skills, among other things. Nevertheless, the service-learning curriculum can and should do more. For instance, it could challenge students to question economic and social decision-making that creates such institutions, ostensibly for providing around-the-clock health care for people who have outlived their economic usefulness, who may interfere with the economic usefulness of family care-givers, and whose economic usefulness is sometimes extended by providing profit centers for health-care professionals and large corporations. Service activity alone poses the risk of covering the symptoms of deep-rooted social problems with band-aid solutions, without confronting the causes of these problems and the potentially greater dangers they present to communities (Lisman, 1998, p. 51). We have in mind the cultivation of activism akin to what Donna Duffy of Middlesex Community College endorses. After participating in community work with people who have psychological disorders, her students typically ask: "Why aren't we doing more to develop resilience in our communities and ourselves?" (Chamberlin, 2000, p. 48)

Service-learning may actually threaten social improvement by causing job displacement. If service-learners could perform many tasks currently performed by paid employees, it would be more economical to rely on the unpaid labor. This possibility becomes more likely if service-learners infuse labor sectors where the existing labor force is relatively unskilled and thus more susceptible to replacement by temporary or minimally trained workers (Oi, 1990). Since many community service agencies suffer from chronic under-staffing and minimally trained employees, the risk of job displacement as an unintended consequence of service-learning poses a real threat.

Properly designed service-learning programs can minimize the risk of job displacement. The argument about job displacement posits a direct tradeoff between service-learners and existing workers. Second, it assumes service-learners would disproportionately occupy jobs that the most vulnerable segments of the workforce now hold. To avoid job displacement, service-learners should occupy positions that would not have been filled otherwise (Moskos, 1990).

Oi (1990, p. 83) estimates that more than five million jobs could be staffed by unpaid service workers. He questions the value of such voluntary labor, claiming that organizations would have little incentive to train large numbers of temporary workers. Sometimes organizations are willing to train service-learners, but they lack the resources. If many personnel suddenly infuse an organization, they may outstrip the organization's ability to prepare or supervise the new recruits (Gardner, 1997). Such a situation highlights the importance of gauging not only the need but also the infrastructural capability of organizations linked to service-learning. If an organization expresses a need for assistance, that request for aid does not necessarily mean that more is better. Service-learning supervisors should determine the maximum number of personnel an organization can train and monitor properly. This number might be far fewer than the number of workers an organization wants.

Caveats and Recommendations

To improve the chances of having a successful service-learning program, it is important to anticipate potential impediments so they can be and avoided or minimized (Kolenko et al., 1996). Service-learning is no panacea for the maladies of higher education. Although service-learning fits well with the imperative to instill in students an ethic of participatory democracy, improperly administered programs can easily subvert even the best intentions. The comments in the following sections offer some direction in addressing consumerism, social activism, and educational technology via service-learning.

1. Explore the Metaphoric Potential of Service-Learning

Palmer (1993) points out that "our culture and institutions tend to take shape around our dominant metaphors of reality, and to hold that shape long after our metaphors have changed" (p. xiv). If that is so, then we need to pay close attention to the metaphors we use to discuss higher education and service-learning. Several alternative metaphors attendant to the invigoration of participatory learning may reduce the pernicious implications of the student-as-customer metaphor. A productive alternative would be to enrich the metaphoric repertoire surrounding education, broadening the vision of students by recognizing their roles as revealed through service-learning. While no single metaphoric framework provides an exhaustive description of the educational process, service-learning introduces at least two relevant metaphors that expand perspectives on education beyond a market focus.

Concerned that communities might be treated as outsiders or guests beholden to academics gracious enough to serve them, Goodman and MacNeil (1999) suggest the metaphor of family. A family's well-being requires mutual dependence among all members without creating hierarchies of value. The community, students, and academic institutions participate in a familial relationship because each contributes something to the other's development. Unlike commercial relationships governed by contracts and caveats, healthy familial relationships foster open dialogues among equals. Consumerism obscures the extent of reciprocity between server and served (Mintz and Hesser, 1996, pp. 35-37). The

familial attitude has far greater affinity with service-learning than the commercial mindset. But the metaphor of family demands further scrutiny, both as an alternative to consumerism and as an apt description of service-learning.

The family metaphor implies unwavering, unconditional loyalty—a condition that devolves into dependency if not reciprocated. Contrary to the inextricable bonds a family implies, a more critical attitude toward the communities forged through service reveals other possibilities. Service-learning does teach how to form partnerships between academics and communities, but it also should teach how to redefine or sever those partnerships. Far from abandonment, severing a relationship with a community organization could signify the organization's maturation into self-sufficiency. Thus the severance becomes analogous to the maturation of a dependent child into a responsible adult. Although families expect loyalty and obedience, the service relationship invites a less hierarchical arrangement of cooperation so that the community comes to rely less and less on external support. In a healthy family, the children grow up, become more independent, and in their turn can assume the role of parenting. Improperly constructed service-learning efforts risk becoming dysfunctional families, with the beneficiaries of service defined as perpetual children, "dependents" in the sense of never learning to help themselves.

Concerns about dependency motivate exploration of a different metaphor: students as partners with the community in addressing unmet social needs (Barber and Battistoni, 1993). The partnership model suggests that academic institutions solicit advice from the community about how to educate students as well as provide advice to the community about how to tackle social issues. A partnership restores conditionality to the service relationship, thus recognizing that community relations are negotiated rather than assumed. Instead of being the knights in shining armor who rescue communities from their own mistakes, service-learners recognize the lessons they can learn from the community. The relationship is a two-way street, with the community teaching lessons unavailable in traditional

classroom settings. In the words of Barbara Jacoby, "Service-learning encourages students to do things *with* others rather than *for* them" (1996b, p. 8).

2. Examine Whose Social Agenda Service-Learning Serves

Service-learning has an inherently political dimension, since it essentially places the stamp of approval on the organizations and causes that students serve (Kahne and Westheimer, 1996). Students who participate in service-learning might be expected to become social activists, instigating social change. In fact, a central principle of service-learning has been identified as the contribution to "the larger struggle to improve social conditions" (Rhoads, 1997, p. 221). This drive for social improvement, while laudable, presents a quandary. Unless a universal good is identified, students will serve particular interests. Whose interests? That question invites reflection on the political agenda service-learning serves.

Service-learning must steer a delicate path between indoctrination and value-neutrality (Ehrlich, 1999). There remains some risk that the interests served in service-learning may reflect disproportionately the social commitments and political attitudes espoused by the professor. Fear of indoctrination became especially acute when, during the first Clinton administration, proposals arose for a national service initiative. The basic argument is that whenever service becomes mandatory, it reflects the ideological commitments of whoever sponsors the service, be it the government, the professor, or the educational institution (Postrel, 1990). Some critics have claimed that the projects that fulfill the mandatory service requirements in Maryland schools qualify as thinly disguised political advocacy (Finn and Vanourek, 1995). But all service acquires a political tint as long as it involves recognition that current conditions are less than ideal and should be ameliorated. Objections to the political side of service tend to target only political agendas the critic opposes.

Attempts to avoid indoctrination could follow another dangerous path. Total renunciation of values would fail to equip students to render "their own moral and civic judgments" (Ehrlich, 1999, p. 7).

Instructors must carefully consider not only the merits of the service-learning projects they approve, but also recognize the ideological implications of the projects. Aside from matching students with projects, it is important to balance the interests that the projects serve. For example, a group of students who choose to promote and distribute birth control devices at community health clinics could encounter opposition from antagonistic groups. To counter the contention that service-learning primarily serves a narrow segment of the ideological spectrum, potential projects should be selected to benefit widely divergent constituencies. The students who distribute birth control devices could be part of a class that includes service at an adoption agency or at a pro-life pregnancy counseling center. The same students could rotate among ideologically different organizations, or different groups of students could serve various organizations. Without such ideological balance, service-learning becomes vulnerable to accusations that it promotes political interests under the guise of altruistic service. Professors, therefore, incur an obligation to "avoid simply inculcating our own views" (Ehrlich, 1999, p. 9) while maintaining moral commitments to serve so that students can make ethical judgments instead of floating in a relativistic stupor.

3. Learn from "Technological Adoration"

An important lesson can be learned from the "technological adoration" that seems to have overwhelmed society in general, and especially higher education (Postman, 1995, p. 38). A fixation on technological fixes is predicated on the belief that the problems are technological rather than moral or spiritual. Both Palmer (1993) and Postman (1995) argue that almost all of the really important problems in education are moral or, we might say, relational, in nature. Consequently, technological solutions are not attuned to the nature of the problems they should remedy. Not only does this render such solutions prone to failure, but also more likely to become specifically counterproductive in regard to the capacity to become engaged and effective in community life and service. Hepburn (1997) illustrates this concern in her description of the "age of being socially disconnected" from direct contact with other people while

being more thoroughly wired to electronic machines (p. 141).

We believe that service-learning as a technique is potentially subject to similar problems. Clients and customers we have learned to manipulate for personal or professional aggrandizement do not warrant the same consideration we give to people with whom we have developed deeper relationships. The only really meaningful "freedom of others" we nurture in clients and customers is the freedom to become dependent on or indebted to us, which is not freedom at all.

Our recommendation is not to abandon technological innovations altogether, but rather to assess critically their impact on the life of the community before accepting them. Concerning service-learning programs, we might pose questions such as those Postman would ask about technology, for example: (1) to whom will they "give greater power and freedom?" and (2) "whose power and freedom will be reduced" by them? (1992, p. 11) If service-learning practitioners routinely addressed these kinds of questions, we might gain more insight about the social impact of service-learning programs than we would by directing our questions at practical and technical concerns.

Conclusion

Kolenko et al. (1996) identify several barriers to implementing service-learning programs, including reluctance of faculty to participate in service, organizational resistance to perceived outsiders in the community, limited institutional funding, and lack of recognition in promotion and tenure considerations. To get to the point of dealing with these concerns, however, service-learning programs must be proposed and advocated. Before questions of service-learning's practical implementation can arise, its champions must convincingly demonstrate that it contributes to an institution's educational mission while strengthening ties to the surrounding community. This essay represents an attempt to articulate how service-learning could do that, provided it acknowledges the need to re-humanize an educational environment marked by economic acquisitiveness, to promote substantive social change, and to recognize the limits of technological enthrallment.

We harbor no illusions about the difficulty of creating actual service-learning programs that fulfill the criteria discussed in this essay. But research should move toward examining which types of practices best meet the ideals encouraged through service-learning. As recently as 1997, Bradley could assert that "there is not a lot of research that supports the claims made by service-learning advocates" (p. 152). As Giles and Eyler (1998) remark: "In short, we need to synthesize research and practice just as service and learning are themselves integrated" (p. 70). Ultimately the test of the scholarship on service-learning lies in the successful implementation of service-learning programs that are sensitive to the kinds of issues we tried to outline.

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